

Reps. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY) and Michael H. Michaud (D-ME) led a meeting of the House Trade Working Group’s meeting with United States Trade Representative Ron Kirk regarding continuation of U.S participation in talks for a Trans-Pacific Partnership Free Trade Agreement with Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, New Zealand, Singapore, and Vietnam.

The meeting focused on the House Trade Working Group’s key issues, which include labor and environmental standards, food safety and agricultural terms, procurement rules, democracy clauses, services deregulation, access to medicines, and foreign investor rights.

“Our goal here today was to begin to find a path forward in achieving reform of our trade policy, and I think our discussion was very positive,” said Slaughter. “But a lot more is needed than words. If other countries are going to try to get their foot in the door for expanded trade here than these nations must respond by opening their markets to the United States. There must be fair and reasonable reciprocal access to all markets to bring our trade policy to a place where workers are not the primary losers.”

“The meeting was an encouraging sign that this Administration is committed to consulting with Congress on their trade agenda,” said Michaud, Chairman of the House Trade Working Group. “We believe it is critical to approach these negotiations as an opportunity to redefine and redirect U.S. trade policy. We must replace the failed policies of the past with those that deliver good paying jobs for American workers and a level playing field for our businesses.”

During the meeting, the House Trade Working Group also discussed the benefits of the Trade Reform, Accountability, Development, and Employment Act (TRADE), which now has 133 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives. A summary of the legislation is below.

H.R. 3012, TRADE Act

Summary of the Bill

- The bill requires the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a comprehensive review of the major trade pacts that comprise the model on which U.S. trade agreement have been based, such as NAFTA, WTO, Jordan, and CAFTA. The GAO must also report on how the current pacts measure up to the bill's criteria with respect to what must and must not be included in trade pacts.
- The bill spells out what should be in trade agreements including standards on: labor, environment, food and product safety, agriculture, human rights, currency anti-manipulation rules, national security, procurement, investment
- The bill also lists issues that should NOT be in trade agreements including: bans on Buy America, bans on anti-sweatshop rules, new rights for foreign investors to promote off-shoring, service sector privatization and deregulation requirements, special protections for pharmaceutical companies that limit affordable access to drugs.
- Renegotiation: Requires the President to submit renegotiation plans for current trade pacts prior to negotiating new agreements and prior to congressional consideration of pending agreements.
- Establishes a Super Committee: The bill establishes a special congressional super committee chaired by the Ways and Means and Finance Committee chairs to work with the President on formulating this plan. The super committee also includes a role for the chairs and ranking members of other committees whose core jurisdiction is directly affected by today's expansive trade pacts.
- Replacing Fast Track: The bill lays out criteria for a new mechanism to replace the anti-democratic Fast Track negotiating process. To obtain agreements that benefit a wider array of interests, this new process includes Congress setting readiness criteria to select future negotiating partners; mandatory negotiating objectives based on the bill's criteria of what must be and must not be in future trade pacts; and the requirements that Congress must certify that the objectives were met, and then vote on an agreement before it can be signed.